

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART  
CLEVELAND 6. OHIO

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THE FILM IN THE MUSEUM

The idea that a Museum is only a storehouse for paintings and sculptures from past ages preserved for the delight of dilettantes and learned dissection by specialists is dead and unmourned in some parts of the world and fast dying in the rest. Of course, these remain important functions of a museum, but exhibitions, lectures and courses of study make up a large part of the program of most museums today. Such programs are often concerned with the living, developing art of the times, as well as the art of the past. In this way museums fill an important place in contemporary life and culture, a place once occupied by the Medici and the Sforza.

One of the most significant developments in the art of the 20th century has been the birth and startlingly rapid growth of the film. Most museums in this country have some kind of a film program today, whether it is only an occasional showing of an important picture, or an organized program to examine the historical development and aesthetics of the film. In a few cases a film library has been formed which is a part of the art collections just as are paintings, sculptures and prints. Such libraries are an invaluable record of the development of an art which is the most popular and perhaps the most significant art of this age. Why should museums bother? Why should they add this uncouth infant to their responsibilities is a question often asked by the "culturevultures." The answer is that it is a job that needs to be done and no one else seems likely to do it. The museum is an appropriate candidate for the job because the film is a visual medium, like paint, or stone, or ink, and out of this medium can be fashioned art or abominations. Frequently it is the latter; but occasionally, when a real artist is involved in the creation of a film an important work of art results, a work appearing on a flat surface and concerned with such



pictorial problems as: composition, pattern, lighting, and sometimes color. Like the painter, the film artist may organize these elements in a decorative way, for dramatic effect, or to suggest emotions and moods. But the film, unlike painting and like music, develops in time. It often includes background music to create a mood or develop tension, but it is in the process of arranging sequences of images to produce rhythms or to develop visual themes and variations of themes, that the film is most musical.

The juxtaposing of images to create visual metaphors is a poetic device developed by film artists such as Sergei Eisenstein, the late Russian director. His propaganda film *TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD*, which was seen at The Cleveland Museum of Art this year, contains some extremely effective montage of both the rhythmical and the metaphorical kind. There is a scene of a firing machine gun, for example, in which two separate shots of the gun in different positions, one brightly lit, one in low key, and a close-up of the machine gunner were cross-cut. When these images were juxtaposed in short bursts on the screen the impression of the clatter of the firing gun was overwhelming, although the film was silent. Another instance in which the effect of sound was stimulated visually was during a scene of dancing by wild Caucasian troops. The accelerating rhythm of different shots of details of the dancers produced a powerful impression of the rhythms of the music.

The study of these and other phases of the art of the film has been the purpose of The Cleveland Museum of Art's film program during the past two years. Last year was devoted to a survey of the influence of Surrealism in the film, while the program this year is devoted to investigating the film styles of some of the most significant directors in film history. We have already seen D. W. Griffith's early poetic film about tolerance, *BROKEN BLOSSOMS*; the Eisenstein film; and M. Fritz Lang's low keyed psychological study of a child murderer. This last film raised important

questions about personal and social responsibility and it also used a dark atmosphere to suggest feelings of terror and the dark corners of the psychotic mind.

The rest of the program will include films by Rene Clair, Jean Vigo, Marcel Carne, John Ford, Jacques Becker, Ernst Lubitsch, Marcel Pagnol, Orson Wells, and Vittorio de Sica.

By Edward B. Henning